WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT MUHAMMAD

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During the Crusades, all sorts of slanders were levelled against the Prophet Muhammad. With the birth of the modern age, which is characterized by a greater degree of religious tolerance and freedom of thought, there has been a change in the approach of western authors who study the Prophet's life and characters. A sampling of their views is given below.

Unfortunately, the West still has not realized the greatest aspect of the Prophet: he is the last of the prophets sent by God to guide mankind to the truth. In spite of its great advances in other areas of life, the West still has not made a sincere and objective attempt to understand the message brought by the Prophet. Although some people have seen him as a person worthy of high praise and have paid him glowing tributes on the levels of personal integrity and achievement, his claim of being the Prophet of God has almost always been rejected, either explicitly or implicitly, as false. It is time to treat this last claim with a spirit of true objectivity and open-mindedness.

Just who was Muhammad? According to all accounts, which are authentic and accepted by all Muslim scholars, up until the age of forty he was known to his people as a decent man. He was not a statesman, a preacher, or an orator. He was never seen discussing principles or theories associated with metaphysics, ethics, law, politics, economics, or sociology. He possessed an excellent character, charming manners, and was highly cultured. But his characteristics are not so deeply striking and so radically extraordinary that people would expect something great and revolutionary from him in the future.

One of Muhammad's customs was to retire to a nearby cave for private sessions of thinking and meditation. This in itself was not unusual, for other people also did this. But when he came out of his cave after receiving the first revelation, he was completely transformed.

Several questions need to be asked here. Is it possible for a person known and respected for his honesty and trustworthiness to announce suddenly that he is the Prophet of God and then begin to

call upon his people to abandon their old lives and beliefs for new ones? Also, if he were a false prophet, why did he suffer through all of the hardships that his people imposed upon him? And why, when his people offered to accept him as their king and to lay all the riches of the land at his feet, if only he would cease and desist, did he refuse to do so? Why did he continue to preach Islam in the face of all kinds of insults, social boycott, and even physical assault by his own people?

Was it not only God's support, along with his firm will, to disseminate the Islamic revelation and his deep-rooted belief that ultimately Islam would emerge as the sole universal religion, that he refused to be cowed and swayed by any of the opposition and plots launched against him by his enemies? Furthermore, if he intended to use Islam as a rival religion against Judaism and Christianity, why did he make belief in Jesus Christ, Moses, and all of the other prophets of God a basic requirement of the Islamic faith?

Is it not an incontrovertible proof of his prophethood that, despite being unlettered and having led a very normal and quiet life for forty years, that all of Arabia stood in awe and wonder of his wonderful eloquence and oratory when he began to preach Islam? It was so matchless that legions of Arab poets, preachers, and orators of the highest caliber failed to produce a composition that could compare with or equal it. And, above all, how could he state scientific truths that would not be known by to the rest of humanity for centuries and that he could not learn about in any other way except through divine revelation?

Last but not least, why did he lead an even harder life after gaining power and authority? Just ponder the words he uttered when he was dying: "We, the community of the Prophets, do not inherit. All that we leave is for charity"

Consider what others have said about this extraordinary man:

> *If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astounding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in modem history with Muhammad? The most famous men created arms, laws and empires only They founded, if anything at all, no more than material powers which often crumbled away before their eyes This man moved not only armies, legislation, empires, peoples and dynasties, but*

millions of men in one-third of the then-inhabited world; and more than that he moved the altars, the gods, the religions, the ideas, the beliefs and souls.... His forbearance in victory, his ambition which was entirely devoted to one idea and in no manner striving for an empire, his endless prayers, his mystic conversations with God, his death and his triumph after death-all these attest not to an imposture but to a firm conviction which gave him the power to restore a dogma. This dogma was twofold: the unity of God and the immateriality of God; the former telling what God is, the latter telling what God is not; the one overthrowing false gods with the sword, the other starting an idea with the words. Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational dogmas, of a cult without images; the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and of one spiritual empire, that is Muhammad. As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask, is there any man greater than he?

- Lamartine
Histoire de la Turquie, Pans 1854, Vol. 11, pp. 276-77.

It is not the propagation but the permanency of his religion that deserves our wonder; the same pure and perfect impression which he engraved at Mecca and Madina is preserved, after the revolutions of twelve centuries by the Indian, the African and the Turkish proselytes of the Koran... The Mahometans have uniformly withstood the temptation of reducing the object of their faith and devotion to a level with the senses and imagination of man. I believe in One God and Mahomet is the Apostle of God' is the simple and invariable profession of Islam. The intellectual image of the Deity has never been degraded by any visible idol; the honors of the prophet have never transgressed the measure of human virtue; and his living precepts have restrained the gratitude of his disciples within the bounds of reason and religion.

- Edward Gibbon and Simon Ocklay
History of the Saracen Empire, London 1870, p 54.

He was Caesar and Pope in one; but he was Pope without Pope's pretensions, Caesar without the legions of Caesar: without a standing army, without a bodyguard, without a palace, without

a fixed revenue. If ever any man had the right to say that he ruled by the right divine, it was Mohammad, for he had all the power without its instruments and without its supports.

- Bosworth Smith
Mohammad and Mohammadanism, London 1874, p 92.

It is impossible for anyone who studies the life and character of the great Prophet of Arabia, who knows how he taught and how he lived, to feel anything but reverence for that mighty Prophet, one of the great messengers of the Supreme. And although in what I put to you I shall say many things which may be familiar to many, yet I myself feel whenever I re-read them, a new way of admiration, a new sense of reverence for that mighty Arabian teacher.

- Annie Besant
The Life and Teachings of Muhammad, Madras 1932, p 4

His readiness to undergo persecution for his beliefs, the high moral character of the men who believed in him and looked up to him as leader, and the greatness of his ultimate achievement all argue his fundamental integrity To suppose Muhammad an impostor raises more problems than it solves. Moreover, none of the great figures of history is so poorly appreciated in the West as Muhammad.

- W Montgomery Watt
Mohammad At Mecca, Oxford, 1953, p 52.

Muhammad, the inspired man who founded Islam, was born about AD. 570 into an Arabian tube that worshipped idols. Orphaned at birth, he was always particularly solicitous of the poor and needy the widow and the orphan, the slave and the downtrodden. At twenty he was already a successful businessman, and soon became director of camel caravans for a wealthy widow. When he reached twenty-five his employer, recognizing his meet, proposed marriage. Even though she was fifteen years older, he married her, and as long as she lived remained a devoted husband. Like almost every major prophet before him, Muhammad fought shy of serving as the transmitter of God's word, sensing his own inadequacy But the angel commanded Read'. So far as we know, Muhammad was

unable to read or write, but he began to dictate those inspired words which would soon revolutionize a large segment of the earth: "There is one God." In all things Muhammad was profoundly practical. When his beloved son Ibrahim died, an eclipse occurred, and rumors of God's personal condolence quickly arose. Whereupon Muhammad is said to have announced,' An eclipse is a phenomenon of nature. It is foolish to attribute such things to the death or birth of a human-being." At Muhammads own death an attempt was made to deify him, but the man who was to become his administrative successor killed the hysteria with one of the noblest speeches in religious history: 'If there are any among you who worshipped Muhammad, he is dead. But if it is God you worshipped, He lives for ever'.

James A. Michene~
"Islam: The Misunderstood Religion,"
Reader's Digest (Amencan ea.) May 1955, pp. 68-70.

My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular level.

Michael H. Hart
The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History,
New York: Hart Publishing Company Inc. 1978, p 33.